



IMMACULATE HEART^{OF} MARY CATHOLIC CHURCH

A LETTER FROM THE PASTOR

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Racism is a sin: a sin that divides the human family, blots out the image of God among specific members of that family, and violates the fundamental human dignity of those called to be children of the same Father.

—U.S. Catholic Bishops, *Brothers and Sisters to Us*, 1979

Dear friends in the Lord,

I was 11 in 1968. Although I was largely ignorant at that age about the powerful social forces in motion around me, I can remember overhearing, from the back seat of our American Rambler, a conversation between my parents about the election that November. 13% of the national vote had gone to virulent racist and arch-segregationist Alabama governor George Wallace, but he had captured a full 43% of the popular vote here in Georgia, and all of our electoral votes. I remember hearing, but not clearly understanding, my parents' dismay about that. "43 percent, 43 percent," my father kept repeating, shaking his head sadly.

My father was more sensitive than many to the ugly reality of racism. The son of Lebanese immigrants in the South, he had been unable to join the Boy Scouts as a child because of his swarthy complexion. But he was also aware, at least as an adult, that it was only "glancing" racism that he had faced, and not the full-bore, systemic racism endured by his black friends. When his young sons pleaded to join the YMCA in the mid-60s, he said no, because the Y in Athens and in much of the South was open to whites only in those years, and he refused to cooperate in that evil.

My father died in 2001 believing that World War II had taught the human family an unforgettable lesson about the dangers of racist ideology and that America in particular had repented of and largely moved beyond its racist past. I am glad he did not live to see the reemergence of this evil manifested so reprehensively and unapologetically in Charlottesville last weekend, and the tragic death that ensued.

In commenting on profound evil like this in 350 words or less, there is the danger of not saying enough, just as in commenting too quickly, there is the danger of not saying the right thing. And I certainly assume that everyone who reads these words shares my abhorrence of what happened in Virginia. But these are times in which everyone—from the corridors of power to the grocery checkout line—must reaffirm what our faith teaches and our common humanity demands: Racism, while it may be a cynical and successful political strategy, is a grave moral disease whose recurrence and aggressiveness should frighten every one of us.